

VZCZCXRO0688  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #0469 0551007  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 241007Z FEB 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6147  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6801  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9457  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5497  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5293  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1409  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 6199  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS BANGKOK 000469

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: THAI MFA UNDERSTANDS IMPORTANCE OF ARF VDR,  
SUGGESTS PHILIPPINES AS CO-HOST ENGAGE

1.(SBU) We engaged Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Director of the Department of ASEAN Affairs Phasporn Sangasubana February 12 to urge Thai participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Voluntary Disaster Relief (VDR) exercise in the Philippines in May. Phasporn explained that disaster management and relief is a priority for Thailand and the MFA, particularly given its role as current ASEAN Chair and planned co-chair of the Intersessional on Disaster Relief. The ASEAN Defense Ministers, meeting in Pattaya, Thailand February 25-27, would also discuss disaster relief management.

12. (SBU) Phasporn stated that there still was potential for both civilian (MFA) and military participation in the ARF VDR and hoped for a positive response. The MFA was encouraging both the Ministry of Defense and Interior (MOI) to participate, but the Ministries as the potential force providers would have to make their own decisions. The MOI's Disaster Mitigation Department served as Thailand's civilian focal point for disaster management. The military continued to have concerns due to the lack of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Thailand and the Philippines. Phasporn said that it was possible that the military could participate in the ARF VDR in the absence of a SOFA, if the activities involved were of limited enough scope, similar to a Command Post exercise.<sup>8</sup> She asked if there were other options for participation along such lines.

13. (SBU) MFA Counselor Suriya suggested that it would help considerably if the Philippines as the ASEAN co-host were to engage the Thai on sending participants and not leave the diplomatic engagement solely to the U.S. Until now, claimed Suriya, the Thai had not heard similar requests from the Philippines, and they wondered how extensive the ASEAN participation would be without the host actively promoting the activity.

JOHN